# How Bernhardt Played A Trick on Mrs. Campbell

## The Great French Actress Discloses a Sense of Humor No One Suspected of Her—and Other Reminiscences of the Notable Tour of Bernhardt and Mrs. Campbell as Co-Stars

*IN her last week's chapter of her delightful memoirs Mrs. Campbell told frankly how she met and fell in love with George Cornwallis West at the time Mr. West was married, his wife being the former Jennie Jerome of New York. What were the disagreements between Cornwallis West and his wife Mrs. Campbell did not disclose. She was content to draw the picture of their meeting, while she was producing a play for Mrs. West, and of the gradual tightening of the bond of friendship.*

*As the world knows, this marriage, starting so romantically, was a failure. Mrs. Campbell, always emotional and impulsive, gave her love freely and gave with it the loyalty of a true, old fashioned wife. When they were married Cornwallis West was in financial difficulties, and Mrs. Campbell herself had always been burdened with financial cares which she never could quite master. She applied herself, however, to her new tasks of economy and was in this regard a faithful partner of her husband.*

*She does not say much of the breaking of this romance. Just the few lines which are included further along in to-day's installment. And then she goes on blithely to tell of her associations with Sarah Bernhardt and of how these two great actresses had fun with one another.*

At left: Mrs. Campbell at the time of her first appearance in America when she hoped to retrieve her lost fortune by a tour in this country. In the Center is Mrs. Campbell as Pygmalion, her favorite part, and, below Sarah Bernhardt as she was when she toured with Mrs. "Pat."

### By Mrs. "Pat" Campbell.

### Chapter VIII.

ABOUT six months after Beo's death a subconscious cloud began to fall upon me.

I took no interest in work or myself.

George was away a great deal on his A. P. M. job, and he seemed anxious for me to go to Wales to his old home, Ruthin Castle. I was there for over three months, and interested myself—spending money—in arranging a wing comfortably; should he go there to fish or to shoot with his friends—or should we go there together again.

The cloud did not lift.

We went to visit friends in Yorkshire—it was still upon me.

Later I joined a touring company playing "The Thirteenth Chair." Money had to be made; George suggested we should spend Christmas with friends of his at Ruthin, and I looked forward to it.

This party never came off. Gradually I realized the cloud was between George and me.

A time of wondering, waiting, striving against incomprehensible difficulties passed.

Then the cloud broke—I heard the truth from George.

His heart had strayed. . . .

And I had to understand that all affection for me, all care of me and all sense of responsibility toward me had gone also.

A fundamental gulf of gracelessness faced me—that neither love nor courage could bridge.

My mother-in-law was brought back very ill from the south of France. For a short time she was in a nursing home in London. Daisy Pless asked me to go and see her. I watched Patsy as she lay in bed; her expression of mysterious defiance touched me; leaning over her I said: "Is there anything in the world I can do for you?" After some moments, in a voice that seemed to come from some other being, she said slowly: "God bless you."

I asked her maid whether there was anything I could do.

"Tell Major West to come to her."

I wrote to George and begged him to go to his mother. . . .

On February 10, 1920, there was a revival of Mr. Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" at the Aldwych Theater, and again this play went with all the old merriment.

On June 3 the production of "Madame Sand," by Phillip Moeller at the Duke of York's Theater.

Dear Madame Sand—she thought it was love that made life worth living.

She loved men of genius, and they loved her—and inspired her work—

Some people liked the play, some praised me, some laughed at my trousers; some would not believe the cigars I smoked were real.

And these are some of the letters that were written to me:

Plumpton,
Sussex.

My Dear Mrs. Campbell:

I am so sorry if I was rude about your trousers, but quite sincerely they wounded me. If only they had been pretty trousers—but they were not. They may be historically correct. But in a play which outrages history in so many vital points, to outrage it further in the stuff and cut of "George Sand's" trousers would have offended nobody and pleased one person at least. C—— glared so formidably at me when you complained of my criticism that I do not dare to ask her how she'd like to wear trousers like that. I don't think she would look very nice, do you? . . .

Affectionately
RUDOLF BESIER.

P. S.—I hadn't really time to tell you that your performance was pure genius—like everything you do.

62, Cadogan Square, S. W.

Dear Stella: They all told me untruthfully that the play was bad and unnecessary, and that you were no good.

I may have failed to disentangle the respective merits, but it seemed to me the play was almost worthy of your acting—more one cannot say.

Many thanks. I enjoyed it enormously.

Yours,
WEMYSS.
(*The present Earl of Wemyss.*)

The late Lord Wemyss was nearly 80 years of age when I first knew him.

His affection and his letters and his interest in my life and my children meant a great deal to me.

I remember once taking a famous actress to lunch with him, and how dreadfully upset he was about her fingernails,—pointed, reddened an astounding vermilion—they caught his eye unmercifully. I explained to him afterward that it was the fashion, but he was distressed. He said: "Nothing should be a fashion that disturbs conversation and attracts the eye from the human countenance."

Courtesy was the breath of his being. I know no one now who makes every woman they address feel a queen.

At Gosford I believe my little dog was the only dog that was ever allowed to sit at the table at meals.

2, Robert street,
Adelphi.

Barrie took me to your play the other night, and we both thought you marvelously good and looking too beautiful, especially in the last act in your pink dress.

You are a wonder!

I do hope it's going to run.

Bless you.

Loving,
Cynthia (Lady Cynthia Asquith).

10, Adelphi Terrace,
June.

I went on Thursday night. I thought the British public absurdly illiterate and stupid. After the second act I felt inclined to come before the curtain and explain to them that the Coliseum was across the road, and that they had come to the wrong house. If they think that Alfred de Muesset's part must be sacred music, at least Grock will make it clear that they are meant to laugh at him. Pigs!

What induced you to imitate Oscar Wilde? It was an inspiration, and amazingly like the original. . . . .Your lovely performance is too good to be thrown away; it is a repertory part. Why can you not act as intelligently as that for me, devil that you are?

G. B. S.

Madame Sarah Bernhardt was brought to see the play by Mr. W. Clarkson, the popular wigmaker. She was very much moved by its beauty, expressing a warm wish to play Pelleas with me. I thought it only a pretty compliment she was paying me.

Six years afterwadl, on one of her visits to London for a short season at His Majesty's Theater, Stella and I went to meet her at the Carlton Hotel. Sarah took me up to her bedroom and pointed to a little cot where a child was asleep, with a roll of parchment tied up with ribbon, at her feet. "Voila 'Yniold,'" Sarah said: she had taught the little thing her role in "Pelleas and Melisande," and Sarah herself was ready to play *Pelleas* with me. My dear Sarah. At first I was very nervous at the thought of acting in French. Sarah only laughed at me, saying *Melisande* would speak French just as I did, and that she could play *Pelleas* with no one else.

*Lady Eden lent me her children's French governess, Mademoiselle Drouin, to live in my house for two weeks. She talked her perfect French with me practically all day and half the night, besides coaching me in the pronunciation of the actual words of Melisande.

So I ventured—how dared I?

I took the rehearsals, and the company never smiled as I "directed"! Sarah altered nothing, but asked my permission to turn her back to the wall of the tower that my hair might fall over her face! Her *Pelleas* was a wonder. She carried her body with such ecstasy and breeding; her voice was the voice of a youthful melancholy spirit, gradually melting into a tenderness, that more than once almost rendered me speechless for fear of breaking the spell.

Mr. W. L. Courtney, in the *Daily Telegraph*, wrote:

"When criticism has nothing to say one may be sure something has been seen rare and strange and beautiful; Madame Bernhardt, in the very beginning, found her note and kept it, low in tone and rich in music. Mrs. Campbell's *Melisande* is known to us from one or two previous representations. We venture to say that in French form it is more gracious and childlike and poetic than we have ever seen it before. Scene after scene passed with short intervals, and the air of mystery and unreality was never broken. We watched the first meeting at Fountain, we heard the quiet fatalism of old age uttered by the lips of *Arkel*. We saw the slow development of the unescapable tragedy enveloping all the characters as it were with vague and shadowy nets, and the light was one which never was on sea or land, and we were—spectators and actors alike—such stuff as dreams are made of. Once, and once only, did we seem to touch earth. It was in the fine scene where *Golaud*, in a mad access of jealousy, holds up the little Yniold to the window to watch the two lovers within.

"We have never seen a better *Golaud* than that of M. Decoeur . . . As one watches this *Melisande* the words rise to one's lips: 'Will no one tell me what she sings?' For she too has caught the secret of 'old unhappy far off things and battles long ago.'"

During a previous season of Sarah's in London the play she produced had not been a success financially (a Napoleonic play, I forget the name), and at the moment Sarah was hard pressed for money; to my delight she sent her secretary to ask if I could help her. Wonderful to relate, I had a hundred pounds in the bank, and I thanked heaven that I was able to do her a service.

During one of these performances of "Pelleas and Melisande" Sarah Bernhardt returned me the hundred pounds, in five pound notes, in a little silver casket, before the many people who were in my dressing room. She said how grateful she was to me—the simple graciousness of her act! Did she ever know, I wonder, how my heart almost choked me?

Sarah is the most generous of women. I think she feels, as I have often felt, that money belongs to those who need it most. Unfortunately, as this feeling slowly beggars us, it changes, alas! or it should!

A story of a really generous man, told me by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, comes to my mind.

A friend came to a generous man to borrow twenty-four pounds. The generous man had only twelve pounds in the world. These he gladly gave to his friend; but afterward, whenever they met, the generous man hung his head; he felt he owed his friend twelve pounds.

In July, 1905, a year later, on Madame Bernhardt's next visit to London, she and I went to the provinces meaning to give only a few performances of the play. But we met with such a brilliant success that we played it every day for three weeks. Sarah paid me £240 a week, and £35 for each additional performance, and paid all traveling expenses. I provided the scenery and dresses.

Only in Dublin did one critic demur. He wrote:

"Mrs. Campbell played *Melisande*, Madame Bernhardt *Pelleas;* they are both old enough to know better."

There are delicious memories of this three weeks' tour. A little story Madame Bernhardt told me of her first arrival in America touched me very much. She carried a rather large handbag of some soft velvet stuff. On landing the official insisted on looking inside. They found a small bundle tied carefully with ribbon. Sarah implored them not to open it. . . . vous en prie, Messieurs, je vous en prie. They insisted. It contained her son's first baby shoes of white patent leather and his first baby shirt.

I remember one night a discussion we had on "flirting." Sarah took this word very seriously: she said that flirting stirred and excited animal passion. That flirting was a peculiarity of English men and women. A French woman loves and gives herself; but to excite passion, "pour passer le temps"—"never," she declared. I said she was wrong, that "flirting" and "coquetry" were one and the same thing; the effect it produced depended entirely on the man and woman's moral character. She laughed and shrugged her shoulders unconvinced. She told me that on her first visit to England a supper was given in her honor; she was treated like a queen and felt like a queen. Her host, when seeing her to her carriage "stole a kiss." She did not speak to him again for years. It was abominable, she said, abominable. It showed he had no respect for her. I tried vainly to explain that flirting did not mean kissing; she only repeated abominable.

Sarah's love of animals is very remarkable, and she was always buying a new pet. One morning at the hotel, when we were playing together at Liverpool, I heard strange and terrible growls, and coarse men's voices coming from her room. I went in and found two low-looking ruffians. They had inside a large iron cage a wild tiger cat. Sarah was saying, "Il sera plus heureux si vous ouvrez la porte," pointing to the not very secure iron door of the cage. The men were suggesting that the door could be opened later, and that they wanted £30.

It was not till I persuaded Sarah that such animals cannot be tamed, and that it would break out of the cage in an hour or so and probably eat her up, that she said it might be a trouble on tour and she would not keep it. The men were furious, and I had great difficulty in getting rid of them.

On one occasion I remember Sarah was charged in her hotel bill for thirty or forty bottles of beer for her servants. We had stayed there only one day and night.

Sarah was tired, and did not stop to think that her servants might have treated friends; she only knew they could not have drunk so many bottles of beer. The manager was sent for, and she argued with him until she raged. Hearing the raised voices I went into the room. The man was white and trembling; and I saw Sarah was almost ill with anger. When I had grasped her argument I turned to the manager, saying: "What matter how many bottles of beer have been drunk, how dare you contradict Madame?" My voice was the loudest, and the man rushed distracted from the room.

Her company indiscreetly told me that Madame Sarah had never been known to make fun or laugh on the stage. In a tobacconist's shop I saw a tobacco pouch made in the shape of a fish and painted to represent one. I bought it, took it to the theatre and tied it down to a bit of canvas at the bottom of the well at the Fountain.

At the performance, when Sarah came to the second act and stood by the *fontaine des aveugles*, she spied the fish and began improvising about *les poissons là*. . . . She stooped gracefully over the edge to take the fish out; as it was tied she nearly lost her balance. Without concern she went on calmly with her part. I laughed, spoiling my lovely little scene.

When the curtain fell Sarah did not allude to what had happened, neither did I. The next day when we lunched together she had a strange, preoccupied expression on her face. Later at the matinee, when we came to the Cave scene, at the point where she tenderly takes my hand and helps me over the rocks, she took hold of my hand, hard—squash—she held a raw egg in hers.

I did not smile, but with calm dignity I went on with my part. I can see now the tears of laughter trickling down her cheeks, and her dear body shaking with merriment as I grew more and more dignified to the end of the scene.

Her company told me afterward almost with awe that Madame must love me very, very much.

The most beautiful performance I have ever seen was a performance Sarah gave of *Phèdre*—she held a crowded house spellbound for over two hours, with scarcely a movement or gesture to detract from the lovely Alexandrines—the great pulsating passion seemed to wind about the audience like a web—it was magic.

They tell me Sarah had seen the great Rachel's performance—what I saw was her own; I knew it by the sequence of its beauty.

The world knows her genius and her colossal courage; but not every one knows the thought and affection she has always ready in her heart for her friends.

At a most tragic moment for her she remembered my anxiety and sent me this cable to America:

Doctor will cut off my leg next Monday. Am very happy. Kisses all my heart.

Sarah Bernhardt, Bordeaux.

To go back to 1898, "Pelleas and Melisande" at the Lyceum was followed in September by Mr. Robertson's production of "Macbeth." We had already played it in the English provinces and in Germany.

I have since learned that it was easier to act *Lady Macbeth* with Mr. Robertson than with Mr. James Hackett, with whom I played the part afterward in 1920.

Perhaps Mr. Robertson was inclined to look upon *Lady Macbeth* as the "star" part, to use the word of the theater. Mr. Hackett surely looked upon *Macbeth* as the solar system. It seemed to me he realized my presence only at his "cues," and more than once seized the opportunity during a strong speech of mine to turn his back to the audience and clear a troublesome catarrh.

We were all proud of Mr. Hackett's success. It was undeniable; his splendid Salvini-like voice—no perceptible American accent—made a great impression. But he had a strange effect upon me; I could not for one moment forget I was on the stage. On his first night I was suffering from an influenza cold; an apology to the audience would have depressed the occasion; there was nothing to do but get through.

I wore *Mélisande's* dresses (twelve years old and made of gossamer). The dresses for *Lady Macbeth* in Mr. Hackett's wardrobe did not fit me, so that in no way was I in tune with Mr. Hackett's overwhelming *Macbeth*.

Mr. Bernard Shaw wrote to me at the time as follows:

"Macbeth" as a production was an ancient Victorian absurdity. Hackett

*Continued on Page Eleven.*

*Lady Eden, the beautiful wife of Sir William Eden.